

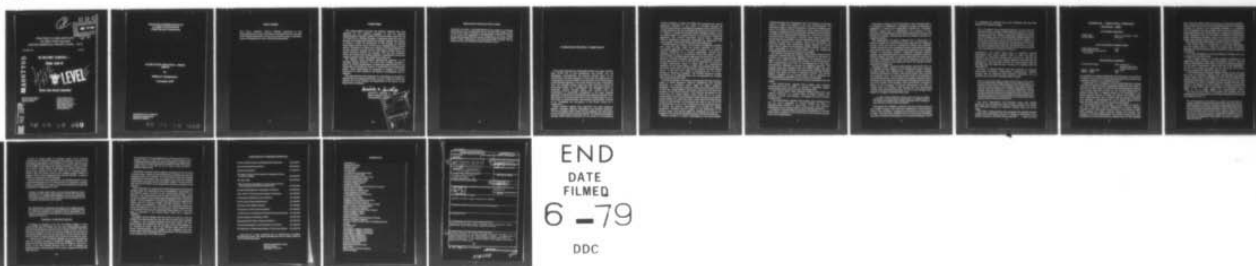
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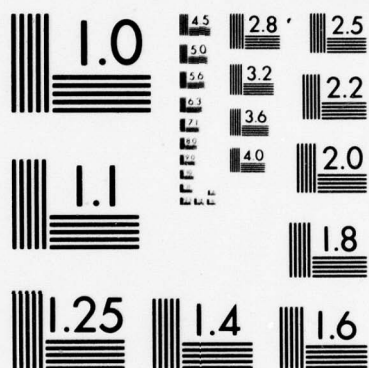
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US MILITARY STRATEGY -  
FROM 1946-78

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**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

**US MILITARY STRATEGY—FROM  
1946-78**

**by**

**William O. Staudenmaier**

**1 December 1978**

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## FOREWORD

This memorandum discusses the military strategies that were spawned by the national strategies of the six political administrations that have guided US security affairs since the end of World War II. Military strategy is examined under the rubric of general war strategy and limited war strategy. General war strategy is looked at from the perspective of the Strategy of Assured Destruction and the thrust of the Carter Administration's nuclear policy. The manner in which the concepts of forward deployment, forward defense, strategic reserve, and theater nuclear forces are mixed constitute limited war strategy. The way that President Carter has mixed these strategic elements is examined as well as the manner in which some critics might do the same job.

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*DeWitt C. Smith Jr.*

DeWITT C. SMITH, Jr.  
Major General, USA  
Commandant

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

**COLONEL WILLIAM O. STAUDENMAIER** has been assigned to the Strategic Studies Institute since his graduation from the US Army War College in 1976. Previously, he served as a divisional air defense battalion commander in Germany and in various staff assignments at the Department of the Army. Colonel Staudenmaier graduated from the University of Chattanooga and earned a master's degree in Public Administration from Pennsylvania State University. He has published articles on air defense and military strategy in Vietnam.



## **US MILITARY STRATEGY—FROM 1946-78**

Three major themes have dominated American strategic thinking since World War II—the geopolitical, the nuclear, and the ideological. Geopolitically, the postwar foreign policy of the United States has been designed to insure that no single power or combination of powers hostile to the interests of the United States could establish hegemony over either Western Europe or Northeast Asia. The strategic nuclear theme has dealt with the problem of preventing nuclear war. Containment, the ideological theme in American postwar foreign policy, has evolved from the containment of monolithic communism to the more classical approach of selectively containing Russian political influence when and where it is in the national interest of the United States to do so. This policy is euphemistically, and perhaps optimistically, referred to as “managing the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower.”

These national policies have spawned two quite disparate military strategies—Massive Retaliation and Flexible Response. The two strategies differ mainly on the emphasis that each places on the concepts of deterrence and defense. The Massive Retaliation strategy relied almost exclusively on the threat of overwhelming

nuclear retaliation to deter the USSR from initiating *any* type of aggression anywhere in the world. It virtually ignored the conventional defense or warfighting capability of the armed forces, relying instead on the forward deployed US ground forces to act as a "tripwire" to signal the strategic nuclear retaliatory attack. It was this rigid reliance on a single response to all levels of Communist aggression that strained deterrence beyond belief. Although Massive Retaliation adequately addressed the geopolitical and nuclear goals, containment demanded Flexible Response.

Flexible Response created a conventional warfighting capability that could be used, under the nuclear umbrella, to counter Communist aggression at lower levels of violence. It set aside the inherent limitations of a tripwire philosophy, putting more emphasis on the use of conventional forces and theater nuclear forces (TNF) to defend against aggression should deterrence fail. However, Flexible Response also needed to emphasize strategic nuclear deterrence as well. It did this by adopting the concept of Assured Destruction, which is based upon the unquestioned capability of the United States to inflict unacceptable damage on the Soviet Union *after* first absorbing a massive strategic nuclear attack. It did one other thing—it introduced the "1/2 War" concept to American strategists. The Flexible Response strategy floundered in the disillusionment that accompanied the Vietnam War, particularly after 1968.

American strategy in the postwar years passed through successive stages of Rigid Response (Massive Retaliation) and Flexible Response to something which might be called "Selective Response." This strategy, which was ushered in by President Nixon in 1969, later called Realistic Deterrence, stems from the three key elements of the Nixon Doctrine. This Doctrine announced to the world that the United States would honor all of its treaty commitments, that the United States would continue to provide the nuclear shield for its allies and that in other cases the United States would provide military and economic aid when it was in the US national interest to do so, but would look to the threatened nation to assume the primary responsibility to provide the needed manpower. President Carter's policy of the withdrawal of US ground troops from Korea might be considered by some as an example of the continued implementation of the Nixon Doctrine.

Military strategy is, in theory, subordinate to the much broader



national strategy that encompasses all of the elements of national power, of which the military is just one. Unfortunately, this national strategy is seldom articulated, so military strategists must derive the national security objectives, which shape the military strategy, by implication from the public statements of the President and other senior governmental officials (e.g., the Nixon Doctrine; Annual Posture Statements). Currently, these objectives include: (1) insuring the survivability of the United States as an independent nation; (2) preserving its peoples, values and institutions; (3) deterring nuclear and conventional attacks against the United States and its allies; (4) terminating conflict, should it occur, on terms acceptable to the United States; and, (5) influencing international affairs from the position of strength.

The military strategy that supports these security objectives and America's national interests requires a deterrent to *all* levels of conflict and a demonstrated capability to be responsive in any region of the world to protect the interests of the United States. This responsiveness must also be accompanied by a will and a determination adequate to achieve our political objectives. The strategy must also recognize that the USSR remains the chief political and military threat to the United States and that Western Europe and Japan are vital to American security. The current defense programs of the United States aim at achieving the following military capabilities in the pursuit of these goals.

- The United States must maintain essential equivalence with the USSR.
- The United States, together with its allies, must maintain conventional forces to deter, or defend if necessary, against conventional attack in Europe and in Northeast Asia.
- The United States must maintain military forces that can respond selectively to a broad range of global changes with precision, control, and restraint, to include the use of theater nuclear forces.
- The United States, together with its allies, must maintain naval and air forces adequate to protect needed sea lines of communication (SLOC) in peace and in war, and sufficient amphibious forces to project power in contingency operations.

In addition to maintaining these military capabilities, the United States seeks to achieve a more stable security environment through arms control negotiations.



The military strategy of the United States, like its foreign policy, is composed of subelements. Unhappily, strategic terminology is inadequate to express the relationship between the "national" military strategy and its subelements. For purposes of this discussion, the subelements will be labeled general war strategy and limited war strategy, realizing that this is a simplistic solution to a complex problem.

The fundamental US goal in general war is deterrence. To achieve this goal, the United States must insure that its retaliatory nuclear forces can survive a preemptive attack with sufficient nuclear destructive force remaining to inflict unacceptable damage upon the Soviet Union. The United States depends on its strategic TRIAD of land-based ICBM's, submarine launched ballistic missiles, and manned bombers to provide this capability. While the TRIAD remains the basis for nuclear deterrence, the decision by the Carter Administration to favor the air-launched cruise missile (ALCM) over the B-1 could signal the end of the strategic manned penetration bomber era.

During the 1960's, American policymakers rejected the first use of strategic nuclear weapons as an employment policy because, morality aside, they believed that a massive nuclear exchange would be cataclysmic. In effect, they did not believe that a nuclear war could be "won"—a view that persists today in the Strategy of Assured Destruction. This strategy soon became mutually assured destruction in the minds of many people, although almost certainly not in the minds of the Russians. The United States continued to believe in the mutuality of assured destruction even while its nuclear lead was eroding; only recently has this countervalue strategy been questioned seriously. In 1972 in his Foreign Policy Report to Congress, President Nixon said:

...a single 'assured destruction' doctrine does not meet our present requirements in a flexible range of strategic options. No President should be left with only one strategic course of action, particularly that of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians and facilities.

This appeal for flexibility resulted in the first critical review of our nuclear strategy, since Secretary McNamara's brief flirtation with a "city avoidance" strategy in his famous Ann Arbor speech in 1962. Two years after President Nixon's call for more flexibility, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger in the Annual DoD Report for FY

75, explained the rationale for a new dimension that has been added to US nuclear strategy:

But if, for whatever reason, deterrence should fail, we want to have the planning flexibility to be able to respond selectively to the attack in such a way as to (1) limit the chances of uncontrolled escalation, and (2) hit meaningful targets with a sufficient accuracy-yield combination to destroy only the intended target and to avoid widespread collateral damage. If a nuclear clash should occur—and we fervently believe that it will not—in order to protect American cities and the cities of our allies, we shall rely into the wartime period upon reserving our 'assured destruction' force and persuading, through intrawar deterrence, any potential foe not to attack cities. It is through these means that we hope to prevent massive destruction even in the cataclysmic circumstances of nuclear war.

Furthermore, the United States seeks to maintain essential equivalence with enemy nuclear forces in order not only to maximize our deterrence posture, but to insure as well that all nations perceive that a true nuclear balance exists between the superpowers. This will help provide the United States with the flexibility and the influence that it needs in its relations with the Third World.

Secretary of Defense Brown has fully endorsed the Assured Destruction—Essential Equivalence—Counterforce Options strategy that he inherited from Secretary Rumsfeld, but not without some reservation. Secretary Brown stated:

None of this potential flexibility, (nuclear options) changes my view that a full-scale thermonuclear exchange would be an unprecedented disaster for the Soviet Union as well as for the United States. Nor is it at all clear that an initial use of nuclear weapons—however selectively they might be targeted—could be kept from escalating to a full-scale thermonuclear exchange, especially if command-control centers were brought under attack. The odds are high, whether the weapons were used against tactical or strategic targets, that control would be lost on both sides and the exchange would become unconstrained. Should such an escalation occur, it is certain that the resulting fatalities would run into the scores of millions.

The SALT negotiations will hopefully insure that nuclear deterrence can be achieved at lower strategic nuclear force levels. The US-Soviet accords on offensive strategic arms are shown below.

The Carter Administration also recognizes the linkage between nuclear and conventional forces as it relates to deterrence. In his posture statement, Secretary Brown said that "... only if we have



# AGGREGATE LIMITATIONS—OFFENSIVE STRATEGIC ARMS

## 1972 INTERIM AGREEMENT

ICBM/SLBM	(USA — 1,710) (USSR — 2,358)
Bombers/MIRVS	NO LIMIT

\* \* \* \* \*

## 1974 VLADIVOSTOK UNDERSTANDING

ICBM/SLBM/Bombers	2,400
MIRVS/Bombers with long-range cruise missiles	1,320

\* \* \* \* \*

## 1978 PROPOSED AGREEMENT

ICBM/SLBM/Bombers	2,400—initially, with subsequent reduction to between 2,160 and 2,250
MIRVS — ICBM/SLBM	1,200—1,250
MIRVS — ICBM	820

the capability to respond realistically and effectively to an attack at a variety of levels can we achieve essential equivalence and have the confidence necessary to a credible deterrent.”

Limited war as a component of the Flexible Response strategy requires both deterrence and warfighting capabilities with which to respond to a wide range of conflict levels and geographic settings. The concept must also provide for the forward deployment of military forces able to respond quickly to the challenges to our global national interests. Finally, the limited war strategy must have a high assurance that a conflict will not escalate to general war, although it contemplates the use of theater nuclear forces, both in Europe and in Asia, for deterrence and defense.

In discussing limited war strategy, it is convenient to divide it into four subtopics: forward deployment, forward defense, strategic reserve, and theater nuclear forces. The manner in which these elements are mixed comprise limited war strategy. For example, if forward deployment and forward defense are both emphasized by stationing sufficient combat forces at their fighting

posts, then less reliance need be placed on a reinforcing capability. The strategic reserve then can be configured more for contingency missions. If, however, the warfighting capability of a deployed force is marginal, then the strategic reserve must be configured for rapid deployment in its reinforcing role. An aggressive employment policy regarding TNF's can also enhance deterrence and provide a potent warfighting capability, while a more passive nuclear policy might require greater commitments of conventional combat power.

The situation today with respect to these factors is as follows:

- The United States is committed to a forward deployment, forward basing posture in both the Atlantic and the Pacific, although the Army ground combat elements are being redeployed from Korea.

- It is also committed to a forward defense in Europe and to an economy of force role in Asia.

- The strategic reserve is in large measure configured to its supporting role in Europe—and is becoming more so. The US military establishment, particularly the Army, is greatly dependent on the reserve components—some would say overly dependent—not only for a long war hedge, but for round out of its active forces, especially with relation to support units.

- The United States maintains theater nuclear forces in Europe and Asia for deterrence against both conventional and limited nuclear attack and for warfighting as well. The US employment policy governing these forces does not preclude their first use, thus broadening the range of available options should deterrence fail; however, the thrust of the US strategy is to conduct a nonnuclear defense, using TNF's only if used against the United States or its allies or as a hedge against an uncontainable attack.

This mix was the result of the limited war strategy that was announced by former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in his Annual DoD Report for FY 77:

Our current approach to the problem is to support two main centers of strength—in Western Europe and in Northeast Asia—and to have the non-nuclear capability, in conjunction with allies, to deal simultaneously with one major contingency and one minor contingency. We also plan, at a minimum, to keep the sea lines of communication open to these two vital centers in the face of a growing Soviet naval threat. We try to allocate resources in such a way that our active forces provide an initial defense capability and our reserve forces provide both important supplements to the more costly active units and the indispensable hedge against non-nuclear campaigns of substantial duration.



Secretary of Defense Brown realizes the vital importance of keeping the nuclear threshold at a low level of risk:

I also believe that any use of nuclear weapons by the two superpowers against one another—whether tactical or strategic—would carry a high risk—though not the certainty—of escalating the conflict to a full-scale thermonuclear exchange.

This concern translates into programs to bolster the conventional forward defense of Western Europe, particularly by active forces. Critics who perceive a lesser military threat to US interests or a lower risk of escalation, have advocated the reduction of both the forward deployed forces and the strategic reserve (see figure 1).

The interrelation of the elements of US military strategy was clearly and concisely summarized by Secretary Rumsfeld:

The defense strategy necessary to support [the goals] requires a powerful and secure strategic deterrent, general purpose forces deployed in the regions of the world judged to be most vital to our foreign policy interests, and a mobile force of sufficient strength to protect major US interests elsewhere should they be threatened.

There is no question that the Carter Administration supports the defense strategy enunciated above, but we are reminded that the strategy of tomorrow is largely determined by the force structure of today. So the defense analyst must look beyond the declaratory military strategy to the force structure to determine if the military capability necessary to support the articulated strategy does, indeed, exist. The FY 79 Defense budget—the first one for which President Carter has total responsibility—gives us such a look.

While we must await the passage of time to determine the central thrust of President Carter's national security program, certain issues have been raised by the FY 79 Defense Budget.

### STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES

- The Carter Administration has continued the Mark 12A warhead and NS 20 guidance system which will enhance the accuracy and capability of Minuteman III.
- Improvement in the SLBM force will also continue with the funding of the Trident Program.
- More controversial, however, are the cancellation of B-1 production and the substantial slowdown of the development of the MX mobile ICBM.

STRATEGIC ELEMENT	BALANCED	INTERVENTIONIST	NONINTERVENTIONIST	ISOLATIONIST
<u>GENERAL PURPOSE FORCES</u>				
1. Land Forces	1. Army 16 Div/USMC 3 Div	1. Reduced Army 12 Div/USMC 3 Div	1. Greatly Reduced Army 6 Div/USMC 2 Div	1. Reduced Army 10 Div/USMC 3 Div
2. Deployment	2. Forward Deployment	2. Forward Deployment	2. Eventually No Forward Deployment	2. Forward Deployment-MATO Only
3. NATO Mission	3. Forward Defense	3. Tripwire	3. Tripwire-Eventually Eliminated	3. Tripwire
4. Force Composition	4. Balanced	4. Strong Navy/Moderate Army	4. Balanced, but Greatly Reduced	4. Super Navy
5. Strategic COMUS Reserve	5. Strong-Interventionist	5. Strong-Interventionist	5. Weak-Noninterventionist	5. Weak - Mainly USMC
6. Guard and Reserve Forces	6. Heavy Reliance	6. Moderate Reliance	6. No Position	6. Heavy Reliance
<u>FISCAL AND MANPOWER</u>				
1. Total Military End Strength	1. 2.0 Million	1. 2.1 Million	1. 1.25 Million	1. 1.91 Million (Estimated)
2. DOD Budget as a Percent of GNP	2. 5.1% (FY 79)	2. 8%	2. 2.5% (FY 76) (Estimated)	2. 6% (Estimated)
<u>STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES</u>				
1. Force Composition	1. TRIAD	1. DYAD-Rombers/SSBN	1. DYAD-Rombers/SSBN	Does Not Consider Strategic Nuclear Issue
2. Strategic Philosophy	2. Assured Destruction Plus Selective Options	2. Assured Destruction Plus Selective Options	2. Assured Destruction Only	
3. Relation to USSR	3. Essential Equivalence	3. No Essential Equivalence	3. No Essential Equivalence	
4. Strike Philosophy	4. Second Strike	4. Second Strike	4. Unclear-Could be Interpreted as Favoring a First Strike	
<u>SOURCE:</u>				
	DoD Posture Statement FY 79 Harold Brown	Precarious Security, GEN Maxwell D. Taylor, W. M. Norton & Co., NY, 1976	Ravenel, Earl C., "After Schlesinger Something Has to Give," <u>Foreign Policy</u> , Spring 1976	Taft, Robert, Jr., "A Modern Military Strategy for the United States," <u>White Paper on Defense</u> , May 15, 1978

NOTE: TIF Not Considered

FIGURE 1. SPECTRUM OF STRATEGIES



Critics of recent trends in strategic nuclear force structure contend that the TRIAD is headed for obsolescence, because of the increasing vulnerability of the ICBM force to newer, more accurate Soviet ICBM's and because the apparent decision in favor of stand-off ALCM's would reduce the assurance of Assured Destruction. Colin Gray, writing in the July 1978 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, believes that the current trend in the strategic nuclear balance is edging "senior Carter Administration defense officials" towards a launch on assessment (LOA) strategy.

Secretary Brown, not unmindful of the Administration's critics, reaffirmed President Carter's determination to maintain a strategic nuclear equilibrium in a speech to the National Security Industrial Association on September 15, 1977:

Although a strategic nuclear attack is the least likely contingency we face, maintenance of the strategic nuclear balance is one of the most vital defense tasks before us. A strategic nuclear equilibrium, in fact, exists between the United States and the Soviet Union at the present time. Some might even call it a stalemate. Strategic deterrence is in effect.

\* \* \*

This Administration is determined to maintain the U.S. strategic deterrent. We would prefer to maintain it through equitable and verifiable agreements for nuclear arms limitations and reductions. But we will maintain it by whatever means and resources are necessary. No one should have any doubts whatsoever on that score.

### GENERAL PURPOSE FORCES

- Perhaps no element of the FY 79 Defense Budget is more controversial than the debate over the Navy shipbuilding program and the associated issue of the future of carrier aviation. The force structure of the Navy in the 21st century hinges on the outcome of the current debate over the size and role of future aircraft carriers and the types of naval aircraft that should be procured for them.

- Critics of the FY 79 Defense Budget are no less acrimonious over the priority accorded to programs designed to enhance the defense of NATO, particularly of the Central Region. Lawrence J. Korb, in the *AEI Defense Review* (Vol. 2, No. 2) assesses the administration's preoccupation with a short, intensive NATO-WP War this way:

The consequence of this strong emphasis on our NATO central front forces is uncertain. There is no doubt that it will have an adverse impact on the strategic and maritime balance and upon our capabilities to influence events in such areas as the Pacific and even on the flanks of NATO. Since history teaches us that we rarely fight the wars for which we plan, this lack of flexibility could be serious.

Oftentimes, national security debates mistakenly focus on force structure issues, when the *real* differences of opinion are with the strategic issues. For example, if a critic believes that the strategic importance of Northeast Asia overshadows any other US strategic interest (and some do), then he can hardly support a force structure that focuses on NATO, if not exclusively, at least as a matter of top priority.

The US limited war strategy of forward deployment and forward defense raises the question of force sustainability, particularly in the NATO context. In order for the "continental strategy" to be effective, the United States must be able to reinforce and sustain the active combat forces during and immediately after a blitzkrieg attack. If the battlefield is not quickly stabilized and negotiations begun, the US "long-war hedge" becomes operative. Now, not only logistic sustainability is a problem, but manpower becomes a major consideration, as well. Given the lack of draft legislation and its consequent impact on the Individual Ready Reserve, it is at least open to question if the United States really has a long-war capability.

Strategies can be changed with the stroke of a pen (or with the change of an administration), but the force structure that is needed to support a new strategy develops much more slowly. For this reason alone, the outlook for the very near term at least appears to be "business as usual." But if the bedrock issues raised by the Carter Administration's first budget is any indication, the next several years could determine which superpower will be preeminent in the waning years of the 20th century.

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